



16 July 2026

Hon Simon Watts
Minister for Climate Change and Minister for Local Government
By email: s.watts@ministers.govt.nz

Dear Minister Watts

LGNZ response to use of climate change assumptions letter to councils

Thank you for your recent letter to councils about their use of climate change assumptions in council planning, infrastructure investment, asset management, and regulatory decision-making. We know you will have heard directly from some individual councils and I am writing to you, as LGNZ President, to provide a broader sector perspective.

Councils are increasingly at the forefront of severe weather events. Gisborne District Council is a good example of that. Local government is making these decisions in a complex operating environment, and we are acutely aware that our decisions have consequences for decades to come in terms of cost and exposure to risk.

LGNZ is not aware of evidence showing that inappropriate reliance on high-end scenarios is a systemic or widespread council practice. Councils are regularly required to make challenging decisions, informed by technical advice, in the face of varying hazard risks, community expectations, and long-term infrastructure challenges. Elected members are constantly balancing affordability today with the need to avoid locking communities into higher costs and greater exposure to risk in the future. Councils are also exposed to legal risk for the decisions they make, and this is an increasingly litigious space.

Existing national guidance from central government encourages councils to consider a range of future scenarios when assessing climate-related risks, including SSP5-8.5 in certain circumstances. In the absence of a standardised national framework, councils have relied on this guidance.

LGNZ has long advocated for improvements in this area. A nationally standardised approach would give councils greater certainty, reduce legal risk and improve transparency for our residents.

We would welcome the Government building on the work to date towards improved consistency, through further development of consistent terminology, mapping, risk assessment methodologies, risk thresholds, and processes for determining risk tolerance. Importantly this standardised approach must still enable local risk tolerances and service levels to be taken into account by elected members and communities. These could in part be implemented through the national instruments for the future Planning Act and Natural Environment Act.

This is also an opportunity for Government to work in closer partnership with local government. Asking councils individually to undertake separate reviews creates additional unbudgeted costs to

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ratepayers and duplication. It will ultimately also lead to inconsistent outcomes. We advocate for one nationally coordinated review, undertaken collaboratively with the sector, to use resources more efficiently.

The review also presents an opportunity to build towards developing a national standard for risk management, consolidating best practice with the practical experience of councils to inform this approach. It would be good to understand what guidance the Government would like councils to use while the proposed stocktake and any updated national framework are being developed.

For some time, investment in resilience has been dramatically smaller than the costs being incurred through repeated recovery efforts. So greater investment in the right risk reduction could reduce the costs and wider impacts of climate change. LGNZ continues to strongly advocate the need for a national approach to adaptation, in particular a framework for how costs and responsibilities will be shared across government and private sectors. Without a shared framework, councils and communities are likely to continue facing significant climate-related costs, and adjustments to climate assumptions are unlikely to materially reduce these pressures.

We look forward to working constructively with you on these matters. We see a good opportunity to develop an approach that's consistent nationally and supports good decision-making. We know the communities we represent would welcome that too.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R Stoltz', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mayor Rehette Stoltz
President
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